

Sermon at Brecon Cathedral

Christmas Day 2014

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Dean of Brecon

December has been a time for decoration of our houses and trees, going to carol services, and shopping. It may even have been a time of anxiety and chaos for some of you. By the time you get to this morning, the decoration, shopping, Christmas cards and carol services are all passed. There's only the cooking and washing up to do. The deep anxiety and chaos of the secular and commercial Christmas has now past. Today is our day. It's our day because we've been waiting for Christ's birth in Advent and now we celebrate and welcome Him afresh.

A family leaving one of the Cathedral services this week said, 'thank Mr Dean for a lovely service. It was great. See you next year.' Well, I've got good news. **You were welcome. You are welcome because God is a generous God. He is a God who loves to give himself, taking the form of human flesh in the Christ child.** Or, take the young family standing around the candle stand, candles flicking, after a service, and a child asks her father 'why are you holding mummy's hand'. 'Because of what we prayed about around the candles.' Whatever they prayed for, God was listening and they were welcome. Or the parent who attended a school carol service recently told me she has attended them for nine years, but she won't be coming again because both her children have passed through school. She is welcome to because God is a generous God. He is a good who loves to give himself, taking the form of human flesh in the Christ child.

You may be here because you have this morning because you lost your spouse/partner and this may will be the only human interaction of the day. **You are welcome because God is a generous God. He is a God who loves to give himself in the Christ child.** You may be here today because your lifestyle is so hectic throughout the year, and you find no space for peace, rest or for yourself. **You are welcome because God is a generous God. He is a good who loves to give himself in the Christ child.** You may be here today because its tradition, like Remembrance Sunday, you always come. Whoever you are, whatever you have done or not done, however you see yourself, you are welcome to, because God is a generous Father who knows you and calls you His child.

Year on year, more people are coming to Church to worship at Christmas. Perhaps because of the emotional and spiritual connection. Perhaps they have had enough of consumerism

and the commotion and stress of busy lifestyles, and this space for an hour gives you space to rest a while and reflect on who you are. To pause. Well, **you are welcome because God is a generous God. He is a God who loves to give himself in the Christ child.**

You may come today because this year has been hard or painful in some way. Perhaps in work, school, university, family, or you've lost a loved one or gone through traumatic divorce or break of a relationship. You may be here because you have been brought by a parent or grandparent and it is expected you will come, just as part of the family tradition before lunch. The generous God in the Christ child welcomes you to. No-one is excluded from God's welcome and generosity.

God is in the music of all our lives if we only rest a while and give time for him to speak into busy and anxious lives. He is among us whether we seek him or not. On the wall of my office I have a plaque that reads 'Bidden or not bidden. God is present'. He is there in the silence, in this Cathedral, in the worship. We are here to come to know this, if we know nothing else from this Christmas day. He is present in the stories we will share around the table and in our homes today, as he was in the story we have heard in Scripture today. He is present in our loving and losses. He is here in this Cathedral sacred space where his children grow in faith, whenever you come. If you come once a week, or once a year. All are welcome to God's celebration.

To celebrate Christmas is to celebrate God's generosity and welcome, and if we are to be transformed into God's image then we, for our part, must show generosity and welcome to others, especially the stranger in our midst. This means being generous with our time, our energy, our given, our hospitality, and generous in the attention we give to others, and be their companion in their life and faith journey. Here is the great mystery that is visible in the generosity we celebrate today that is seen in God sending the Christ child to be among us. Be generous in kind words offered, in overtures of friendship and good will. Even small gestures of welcome and generosity can have big consequences.

And so, all are welcome because God is generous. We are welcomed by the child born in a stable with a pure heart. The child who weeps at the pains of others. The child who grew to become a peacemaker and victim. It was Jesus, the Word made flesh who dwelt firstly in Mary's womb for nine months, and then came into the world to be worshiped by shepherds close by, and wise men from far away. Whether you feel God is near or far away like the shepherds and wise kings, God is present and welcomes you. The eternal Son became a child so that you and I will be welcomed, because God is generous and makes us his

children, so that we can enter not into the 'shadow kingdom' of fear and poverty, but the kingdom of our loving Father.

The milk of generosity does not come so much from the political and economic cows and goats, even though they have a responsibility to serve the poorest. It comes from that great repository of welcome and compassion in the human heart that is found in God's generosity.

And now it's time to rest a while! After all the arrangements, cards and cooking, shopping and planning, it's Christmas Day. Consumerism has had its days. Yes, this is our day, the day the Church tells the world the Christ child has been born and shows us a new way of living and serving. This is the day when say **you are welcome because God is a generous God. He is a God who loves to give himself in the Christ child.**

The 17th Century poet Richard Crashaw of the Holy Nativity of our Lord captures our welcome Christ today:

 Welcome, all wonders in one sight!
 Eternity shut in a span; Summer in winter; day in night;
 Heaven in earth, and God in man.
Great little one, whose all-embracing birth Lifts earth to heaven,
 stoops heav'n to earth.

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